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ABSTRACT

This action research project examined the impact of a character education program to enhance the learning environment in schools. The targeted population consisted of students in grades 1, 2, 3, and 6 and in a self-contained second, third, and fourth grade special education class. Students exhibited behaviors that reflected a lack of positive character traits in the schools. The need for character education was documented through data revealing the perceptions of students, parents, staff, and administrators. The research investigated probable causes for the lack of positive character traits demonstrated by students. Through use of surveys, questionnaires, checklists, and interviews, it was determined that core character traits were deficient in the students' daily interactions. Upon reviewing suggested interventions from current literature by knowledgeable others, eight core character traits were selected as the character education program focus. Acknowledgment and recognition of these character traits were incorporated into the curriculum. Relating literature with a character theme was also a key strategy. Post-intervention data indicated that the implementation of a character education program encouraged positive student interaction. With daily implementation through direct instruction, use of literature, and parental involvement, the learning environment was greatly enhanced. (Contains 5 figures and 41 references. Nine appendices contain parent letter, parent and student surveys, three questionnaires, parent and student post-surveys, and project key words.) (Author/BT)

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Building Character Education in our Schools to Enhance the Learning Environment

by

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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DEDICATION

We
dedicate
this project to the
students in our classrooms
who participated in this study.
Our goal was to enhance students' character.
We strive to model core character traits
in the interest of making us
better teachers. We will
always remember
our class of
2001!

ABSTRACT

This action research project examined the impact of a character education program to enhance the learning environment in our schools. The targeted population consisted of students in grades, first, second, third, sixth and a self-contained second, third and fourth grade special education class. Students exhibited behaviors that reflected a lack of positive character traits in our schools. The need for character education was documented through data revealing the perceptions of students, parents, staff, and administrators.

Throughout the research project the researcher investigated probable causes for the lack of positive character traits demonstrated by our students. Through the use of surveys, questionnaires, checklists, and interviews, it was determined that core character traits were deficient in the students' daily interactions.

Upon reviewing suggested interventions from current literature works by knowledgeable others, eight core character traits were selected as our character education program focus. Acknowledgement and recognition of these character traits were incorporated into the curriculum. Relating literature with a character theme was also a key strategy.

Post intervention data indicated to the researchers that the implementation of a character education program encouraged positive student intervention. With daily implementation through direct instruction, use of literature, and parental involvement, the learning environment was greatly enhanced.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The targeted students in grades first, second, third, sixth and a self-contained second/third Special Education class exhibit a lack of positive social behavior traits, moral reasoning and character development that affect their learning environments. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes behavior referrals to the administrators, teacher observations, formal survey of staff and students and informal teacher conversation.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research project was conducted in two neighboring school districts. The settings will be described as Site A and Site B. Site A is in a unit district and serves eight neighboring communities. Site B is an elementary district and serves four communities.

Site A is located in a northwest suburb of a large midwestern city. The school opened in 1979 as a facility to serve kindergarten through fifth grades. The total enrollment is 829 students. Of these 93.2% are White, 0.7% are Black, 3.6% are Hispanic, 1.7% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.7% are Native American. The percentage of low-income students is 1.3% and the percentage of students with limited English proficiency is 7.0%. The student attendance rate is 96.2%, the student mobility rate is 9.2% and the chronic truancy is 0.0%. (Illinois School Report Card, 1999)

Site A facility consists of thirty-three regular classrooms, a library, computer lab, multipurpose room, gymnasium, teachers' lounge, six small offices for specialists, lunchroom located on the lower level and two mobile units that house four classrooms. The main office consists of a work area for the two secretaries, the nurse's office and one office each for the principal and the assistant principal.

Site A's student population is made up of six half-day kindergarten classes, six classrooms each of first, second, and third grades, five classrooms each of fourth and fifth grades and three special education self-contained classes. This accounts for 39 classroom teachers and 12 classroom aides who are assigned to assist individual students or a special class. The average class size is 24.0 for Kindergarten, 24.8 for Grade 1 and 26.4 for Grade 3. There is a sign language interpreter for one student. Because of the large number of students, music and physical education classes are taught by a full-time and part-time teacher for each area.

A part-time band instructor works with the fourth and fifth grade students that choose to participate. Students are additionally served by three full-time learning disabilities teachers, a full-time reading literacy teacher, a part-time gifted teacher, one part-time media specialist who is assisted by a full-time aide. There is a full-time speech/language pathologist for the building plus a part-time speech/language pathologist who works with students in two of the special needs classes. To meet the extensive needs of the students there is a full-time social worker, full-time nurse, part-time occupational therapist, part-time hearing itinerant, part-time school psychologist, adaptive physical education therapist. A family educator is on staff part-time and the district also provides the building with foreign language interpreters when needed. The district is currently searching to hire an English as a Second Language teacher for the building. A police office is assigned to the building to teach the D.A.R.E. program. All students receive instruction in

Language Arts, Reading, Math, Science, Social Studies, Media, Art, Physical Education and Music.

At the administrator level for Site A, this is the fourth year for the principal and the fourth assistant principal in four years. There are two secretaries, one full-time custodian during the day and two full-time evening custodians. In addition, there are numerous paid cafeteria workers and lunch recess supervisors. There is high degree of parent involvement in and out of the classrooms, with an active Parent Teachers Organization that is extremely supportive of building programs.

The school district functions by using a site-based management system. A school improvement planning team in each building is responsible for developing and implementing goals and objectives that meet their needs. Site A's school improvement goals state that the school will be a safe and secure facility that will provide an optimal learning environment, the stakeholders will provide a state-aligned curriculum and educational opportunities and will also improve communication to promote involvement, understanding and cooperation in order to enhance educational opportunities. The school improvement team is made up of administrators, teachers, parents and community members.

Site B is a neighboring northwest suburban school district. It is an intermediate school that services students in grades six through eight. The total enrollment is 772 students. Of these, 92.6% are White, 04.4% are Black, 4.9% are Hispanic, and 1.9% are Asian/Pacific Islanders. The percentage of low-income students is 10.5%, and the percentage of students with limited English proficiency is 0.9%. The student attendance rate is 94.6%, and the student mobility rate is 8.8%. The chronic truancy rate is 0.0%.

Site B facility consists of 27 regular classrooms, three learning disabilities classrooms, a technology lab, a learning center, two computer labs, multipurpose room, gymnasium, lunchroom, teachers' lounge, seven small offices and a band room. The building also includes special education classrooms housed in an attached wing. The main office consists of a work area for two secretaries, the health clerk's office, the principal's office, and a small workroom.

Site B's faculty consists of 50 teachers. The average experience is 11.4 years, and 50.9% of the faculty have earned Master's Degrees. The average teacher's salary is $37,773, and the average administrator's salary is $77,970. (Illinois School Report Card, 1999)

The student population is made up of ten classrooms of sixth graders, nine classrooms of seventh graders, and eight of eighth graders. There is a multi-age middle school ESL classroom taught by a full-time English as a Second Language teacher. There are five learning disabilities teachers, as well as four aides for the learning disabilities program. Students are additionally served by a full-time social worker and psychologist. Part-time services include a speech/language pathologist, and occupational therapist, a gifted teacher, and a technology specialist. Twenty-two special education teachers service thirty-six special education students in an attached wing at the sight. There are five inclusion aides assigned to five students. The average class size is 15.44 students. The operating expenditure per pupil is $5,049. Site B services overflow students from another site who are shuttle bused because of overcrowding at another district middle school.

Site B is proud of its many extracurricular activities, its peer mediation program, and its Student of the Month awards. Its band program is considered the pride of the community. Site B has good parent participation and an active Parent Teacher Organization.

The Surrounding Community

Site A is located in a fast growing suburban area with quick access by interstate to two large metropolitan cities. Median family income for 1998 was $68,680 and the median home value was $176,578. Houses are being built at a rate of 30 new homes per year. The average length of time a home stays on the market is from 30 to 100 days. Community officials have sought to contain and control population growth as stated in the *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1999.

Since 1980 the population has nearly quadrupled, to 21,400 which was reported in a 1998 special census. The growth is partially due to relocation of the corporate offices of a major national retailer, as well as the development of numerous industrial parks. In the attempt to encourage the relocation of major corporations to this area, the local communities have allowed long-range tax exemptions that affected the tax base allocations for this school district. The downtown business district as well as additional new shopping centers provide more stores and restaurants than ever before, with traffic congestion one of the community's top concerns. In recent years, new schools and additions to existing schools have been built to accommodate the expanding population. With the failure of three consecutive referendums, growth has surpassed optimum building capacities.

The community surrounding the Site B school is also located in a fast-growing suburban area. The types of dwellings are mostly single-family homes, but there are several sizable apartment complexes. The majority of residents are relatively stable members of the community. The median family income is $58,132, and the median home value is $172,100. Average rent for an apartment is $700.00.

There is a small, older downtown area located a few miles from Site B. A revitalization effort has drawn more businesses and customers to this quaint, shopping area. The community is also serviced by the Metra/Union Pacific Northwest line which transports 1,400 riders daily from

this downtown location. Traffic congestion is an ongoing concern in the community, as well as managing its rapid growth. Builder impact fees of $4,750 per house for schools are being charged to developers in order to offset the cost of this influx of students to the school district.

National Context of the Problem

In general, character, good or bad, is considered to be observable in one's conduct (Walberg & Wynne, 1989). Thus, "character" is different from "values" in that values are orientations or dispositions whereas character involves action or activation of knowledge and values. From this perspective, values are seen as one of the foundations for character. Educators are concerned with the disintegrating social behaviors observed in classrooms, hallways, lunchrooms and playgrounds. Societal emphasis on material possessions and self-interest seems to have led to a decline in family values and responsible behavior.

There is a need for character development in schools today. Classroom activities should include developing respect, responsibility, integrity, trustworthiness, and caring. The Character Education Manifesto of 1996 states that schools have an obligation to foster these traits in students. (Ryan, 1996)

There are compelling reasons to incorporate character education in all aspects of school curriculum. The ten reasons for character education (Lickona, 1991) are:

- There is a clear and urgent need, as young people increasingly hurt themselves and others because of unawareness of and/or indifference to moral values.
- Transmitting moral values to the next generation has always been one of the most important functions of a civilization.
- The school's role as character educator is even more vital when millions of children get little moral teaching from their parents, communities, or religious institutions.

- Common ground exists on core moral values although there may be significant disagreement on the application of some of these values to certain controversial issues.
- Democracies have a special need for moral education, because democracy is government of and by the people themselves.
- There is no such thing as value-free education. Schools teach values every day by design or default.
- Moral questions are among the great questions facing the individual person and the human race.
- There is broad-based and growing support for character education in the schools.
- An unabashed commitment to character education is essential if we are to attract and keep good teachers.
- Effective character education is a do-able job which improves student behavior, makes schools more civil communities, and leads to improved academic performance.

Character education is not merely an educational trend or the school's latest fad, it is a fundamental dimension of good teaching, an abiding respect for the intellect and spirit of the individual. (Ryan, 1996) The Character Education Partnership was launched in March 1993, as a national coalition committed to putting character development at the top of the nation's educational agenda. (Lickona, 1993) Members of the Partnership are made up of representatives from business, labor, government, parents, youth, faith communities, and the media. This Partnership provides services that include character education materials and an annual conference. In the 1990's, many books have been published regarding character education. A new periodical, the *Journal of Character Education*, is devoted entirely to this subject.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of a lack of core character traits and a poor understanding of key character words, targeted students in grades first through fourth at Site A and students in grade six at Site B were surveyed. Data was also collected in the form of a survey from parents, and a questionnaire from faculty, staff and administrators.

Each of the eight-one students at Site A and the twelve students at Site B were asked ten questions in the student survey.

Figure 1 documents the students' responses to their surveys. Students at Site A and Site B answered survey questions concerning how they were expected to behave in the classroom, in the hallways, and with respect to their peers. There were also questions concerning school rules and consequences related to poor behavior and students' perception of their learning environment.

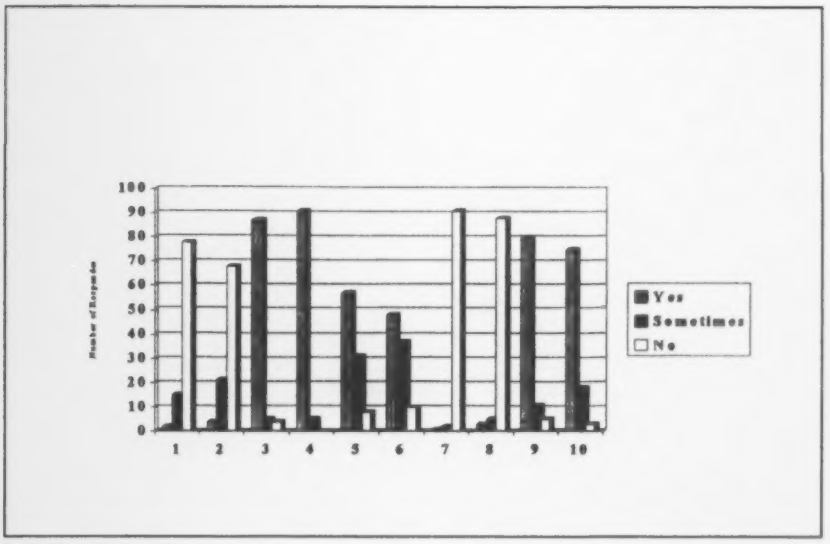

Figure 1. Questions 1 through 10 of the Student Survey (See Appendix A).

With regard to the questions concerning school rules, 96% of the students agreed that all students should follow school rules. Ninety-three percent of the students surveyed stated that there should be rules in the classroom and 82% disagreed with the statement that students should be allowed to run in the hallways at school.

These statistics appear to show that the majority of students feel that rules are necessary for appropriate conduct in a school environment.

The next category surveyed contained questions regarding the consequences for breaking school rules. Ninety-two percent of the students surveyed responded that students should sometimes or always lose privileges if they don't follow the rules. Eighty-nine percent of the students surveyed responded that parents should sometimes or always be called if a student breaks a rule.

Pertaining to questions regarding students' behavior and interactions with peers, the survey suggests that 97% of the students surveyed disagreed with the statement that it is okay to

hurt someone else. Upon further study, 92% of the student surveyed disagreed with the statement that if someone hits me, I should be able to hit him or her back.

The remaining questions on the student survey related to the learning environment at school. Eighty-three percent of the students surveyed stated that it was easier to learn in a quiet classroom while eleven percent indicated that it was sometimes easier. These statistics seem to indicate that a quiet classroom provides an excellent learning environment.

As Figures 2 through 5 indicate, the parents surveyed responded to seven questions regarding character education as part of the school curriculum. A copy of the parent survey can be found in Appendix A.

The results of the parent survey appear to show that 80% of the parents agree or strongly agree that a character education program is an important part of the school curriculum. This supports the problem statement recognizing a need for a stronger emphasis on character education in our schools.

The data from questions one and three is somewhat inconsistent with responses given regarding character education being taught at home or at school. With regard to question one, 35% of seventy-nine parents who responded agreed or strongly agreed that character education should be taught exclusively at home. With regard to question three, 81% of seventy-eight parents agreed or strongly agreed that character education should be an integral part of their child's education at school. The results of the survey suggest that 88% of seventy-seven parents who responded to question number five are aware of the character education program that is in place in their school.

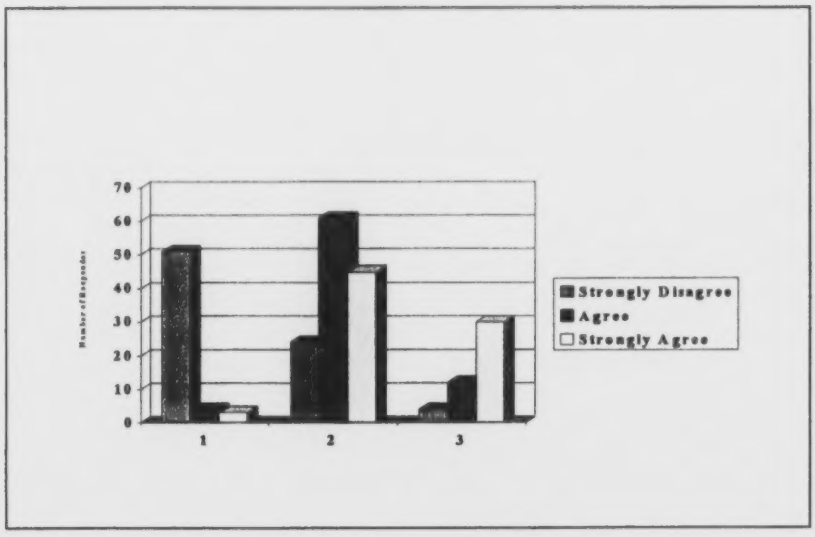

Figure 2. Questions 1, 2 & 3 of the Parent Survey

1. Character Education should be taught exclusively at home.
2. Character Education has been an integral part of my child's education at school.
3. Character Education <u>should be</u> an integral part of my child's education at school.

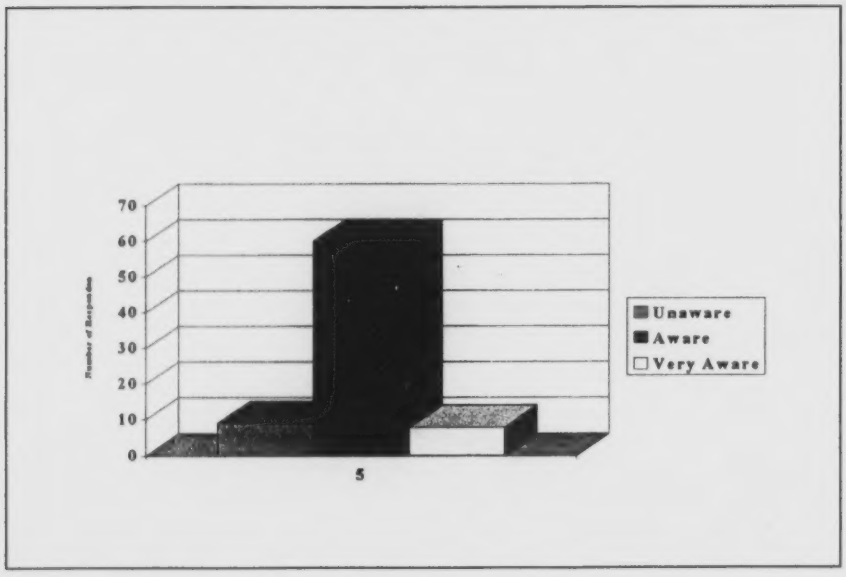

Figure 4. Question 5

5. I am aware of the citizenship/character education at school.

Of seventy-eight parents responding to question four, 68% indicated that their children has a clear or very clear understanding of the key character words and 32% did not. Out of seventy-eight parents responding to question six, 68% indicated that their child discusses the key character words at home sometimes or often. Upon further study, 94% of seventy-seven responses indicated that students sometimes or often demonstrate at home the behavior that reflects the key character traits.

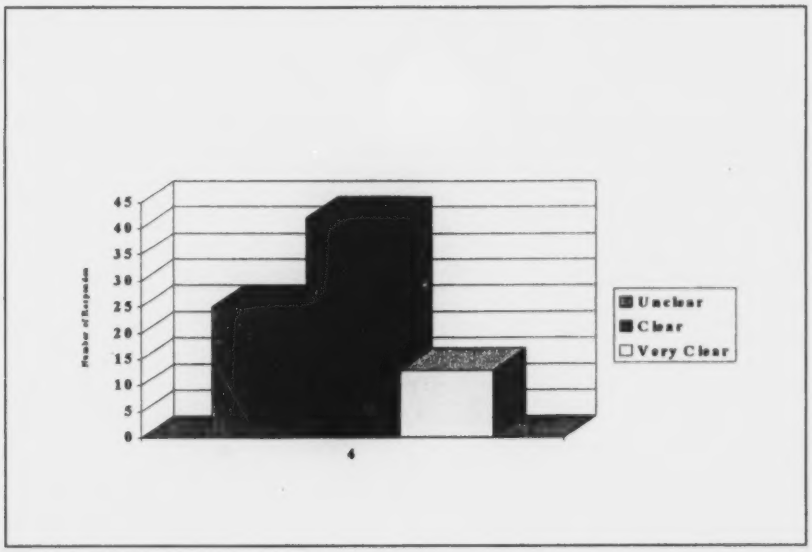

Figure 3. Question 4

4. My child has a clear understanding of the eight key character words.

Figure 5. Questions 6 & 7 of the Parent Survey

6. When my child comes, he/she talks about key character words.
7. When my child comes, he/she demonstrates behavior that reflects the key character words.

Teachers and support staff were asked to fill out questionnaires containing seven questions regarding character education in their schools. Questions pertained to school climate, student behavior problems, building procedures, and the teachers' level of understanding students had in reference to their behavior and the consequences. Finally, teachers and support staff were asked if they felt their building's current behavior plan was effective, and if a character education program would affect student behavior.

The teachers and support staff expressed very mixed reactions to the questions regarding school climate. Answers ranges from "good, under control", and "in general, I don't think we have many serious problems; in the grand scheme of things students are pretty well behaved," to "mediocre" to "poor."

In response to the question regarding reasons why students are sent to the office, answers included foul language, misconduct, fighting, disregard for rules, threatening others, physical aggression and lack of respect for peers and adults.

The majority of surveys indicate that the building procedures are ineffective and lack consistency, particularly at Site A.

In general teachers seemed to feel that students understand what is expected of them in the classrooms, but are not always aware of expectations throughout the building. Also, many teachers feel that students understand the consequences in the classroom, but consequences outside of the classroom are not clear and are handled in an inconsistent manner. Some teachers stated that students have no fear of being sent to the office. "Rules are clear but consequences are not consistent, so students feel they can test." Another staff member stated that " a school's discipline plan, in my opinion, is only as effective as the school's administrative leadership. At (Site A) neither is effective."

Overall, staff members at Site A indicated that they felt the current school character education program had little effect on student behavior. Concerning the "Word of the Week" at Site A, one respondent stated, "those children who hear these ideas at home are reinforced by what is said at school, but I think that their behavior would be the same without the "Word of the Week.' To others it is jut more talk-words that go in one ear and out the other." Another person's response to this question was, "Overall, probably not. Some students probably pay attention to it, but they are ones who don't need it." Another said, "I believe that it could have some effect, but I feel that it doesn't because it is not emphasized by enough staff to be so. There is not enough mention of it, or reinforcement of the behavior the word of the week suggests. Staff feel they are too busy to include this."

Yet, most faculty and staff members were in agreement that a character education program is beneficial for improving student behavior, thereby enhancing the learning environment of all students.

There seemed to be a general consensus among staff and administrators at both sites that in order for a character education program to work, the entire school needs to make a conscious and consistent daily effort. While teachers are the most important role models for their students, the students also need to see the entire staff recognize key character traits and reinforce positive behavior.

At Site B, while the majority of staff and administrators surveyed felt that their school climate was positive, many also indicated the need for improvement. Staff and administrators alike mentioned an awareness of declining respect and responsibility on the students' part in general. A lack of caring and compassion in peer interaction in the hallways and at recess was quite evident.

The idea of rewarding positive behavior and using awards and recognition was enthusiastically embraced by many staff members. One teacher said, "consistent, negative consequences are necessary, but it would be nice to reward good behavior even more than is currently done."

In modern times there are opposing views about the practice of education. There is not general agreement about what the young should learn either in relation to virtue or in relation to the best in life: nor is it clear whether their education ought to be directed more towards the intellect than towards the character of the soul. The problem has been complicated by what we see happening before our eyes, and it is not certain whether training should be directed at things useful in life, or at those conductive to virtue, or at nonessentials. All these answers have been given. And there is no agreement as to what, in fact, does tend toward virtue. Men do not all prize most highly the same virtue, so naturally they differ also about the proper training for it.
- Aristotle, 4th Century B.C.

Probable Causes

The literature suggests a variety of causes for students' lack of core character traits that interferes with basic respect and responsibility toward others. A major underlying cause, according to Lickona (1991) is the following:

> The 1960's saw a worldwide surge of "personalism"... . It led people to focus on expressing and fulfilling their obligations as free individuals rather than members of groups such as family, church, community or country.... From this new focus came many good things, such as the civil rights movement, a concern for the rights of women, and a new respect for the child as a person. But along with these advances came problems. People began to regard any kind of constraint on their freedom as an intolerable restriction of their individuality. (p.9)

This focus on individual rights contradicts the values that need to build the foundation of schools. Adults need to help schools become moral communities where students internalize fundamental values. It is important that the school community, parents, and citizenry together recognize and support these efforts.

Another cause as Huitt (1998) reported:

> Since the 1960's teacher education has downplayed the future teacher's role as a transmitter of social and personal values and emphasized other areas such as teaching techniques, strategies, models, and skills. (e.g. Nucci, 1986) More and more the vision of a good teacher is as the good technician, the skilled craftsman, who has acquired those behavioral skills and strategies that the "effective teacher" research claims are related to achievement. However, the fact "effective" is defined as the students' scores on standardized tests of basic skills, but without reference to higher-order intellectual processes or concern about the students' morals, is of concern to many parents and educators. Educational psychology, rather than philosophy and religion, has become the basis of teacher training. (Ryan, 1989) In most cases, educational psychology focuses on the individual, separated from the social context. Additionally, modern education has been heavily influenced by the behavioral approach, which is proved adept at developing instructional methods that impact achievement as measured by standardized tests. In the opinion of most researchers in the area of character and moral development (e.g. Lickona, 1991; Nucci, 1989), additional emphasis must be placed on the philosophical "why" of education in additional to the technical "how."

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Imagine a classroom where the students are actively engaged in an experienced based project, working in cooperative groups, and using problem solving skills, but off in the corner one group is experiencing a breakdown in their group dynamics. Without a strong base of core character traits, this group could lose valuable and productive learning time. However, with the incorporation of a strong character education program, these students could resolve their differences quickly and get back to their task of learning.

As schools attempt to design character education programs to use in their buildings, they need to address issues that are pertinent to their own population. Campbell and Bond (1982) suggest addressing three major concerns. First, what constitutes good character, second, how to measure it so that efforts at improvement can have corrective feedback, and third, how to best develop the program. Good character is defined in terms of one's actions. Character development traditionally has focused on those traits or values appropriate for the industrial age, such as obedience to authority, work ethic, working in groups under supervision, etc. However, according to Huitt (1997), modern education must promote character based on values appropriate

for the information age: truthfulness, honesty, integrity, individual responsibly, humility, wisdom, justice, steadfastness and dependability.

Character Education

Despite its rather trendy sound, character education has been a goal of the United States system of public education from the beginning. Colonial children learned moral values with their letters and sums, according to Streshly and Schaps (1988). Moral values have deteriorated as social changes have occurred in the years since World War II. At that point in history, major changes took place in work patterns, housing styles, dress, sexual habits, manners, language, music, entertainment, and family structure. Nel Noddings (1995) says that while schools have responded, albeit sluggishly, to technological changes with various additions to the curriculum and narrowly prescribed methods of instruction, they have largely ignored massive social changes. Noddings reports that when they have responded, they have done so in piecemeal fashion, addressing isolated bits of the problem. Thus, recognizing that some children come to school hungry, schools provided meals for poor children. Alarmed by the increase in teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, schools provided sex education. Many more examples could be offered, but none of these, nor the collection of them adequately meets the total social educational needs of today's students.

As Charles C. Haynes tells us, many Americans desire to have strong character education in the public schools. There is growing recognition across the religious and political spectrum that character education in schools must be an essential component of the effort to develop civic virtue and moral character in our nation's youth. Haynes (1999) advises rooting character education programming in the democratic principles of the United States Constitution because those principles are the core civic values that bind America as one nation with many peoples and

faiths. With today's diversity of ethnic and religious lifestyles, it is more important than ever that both schools and communities reaffirm the obligations of citizenship that we share across our differences. Therefore, carefully taught civic education in the United States is, in essence, character education. Schools have always attempted, in some form, to encourage each generation to continue habits of good citizenship. Done effectively, schools enable students to participate appropriately as adults in society. In addition to learning about public policy issue through civic education/character education, students learn to respect the rights of others, even those with whom they disagree. Students learn how to debate openly and fairly with civility and respect. A shared understanding of the civic virtues necessary for good citizenship is a logical starting point for achieving moral agreement in our nation.

According to Nucci (1986), since the 1960's teacher education has downplayed the future teacher's role as a transmitter of social and personal values and emphasized other areas such as teaching techniques, strategies, models and skills. More and more the vision of a good teacher is a good technician, the skilled craftsman, who has acquired those behavior skills and strategies that the "effective teacher" research claims are related to achievement. However, the fact that "effective" is defined as the students' scores on standardized tests of basic skills, but without reference to higher-order intellectual processes or concern about the students' morals, is of concern to many parents and educators. Educational psychology, rather than philosophy and religion, has become the basis of teacher training. In most cases, educational psychology focuses on the individual, separated from the social context. (Ryan, 1989)

Jacqueline M. Woodbury, Ph. D. (1997) has spent over fifteen years in the classroom teaching students from the elementary through the graduate level. As Woodbury observes, "if classrooms get bogged down by lots of specific negative rules, just get rid of them!" Woodbury

contends that it is important to start introducing the philosophy of having no rules, just rights, in the classroom beginning at the elementary level. By the time students reach the middle school level, they begin to realize that at their age they no longer need rules. Instead, students are going to have rights, just as adults have rights. A teacher can generate much interest an enthusiasm by capturing the students' attention and curiosity with this reasoning. Her summary of the five rights and responsibilities for effective classrooms are as follows:

1. **Everyone has the right to live safely.**

   This policy encompasses all rules concerning aggressive behavior and can be discussed in the context of the right to a healthy environment.

2. **Everyone has the right to learn.**

   This second policy protects the learning environment and stops any behavior that distracts a student or is disrupted.

3. **Everyone has the responsibility to be polite.**

   This policy stresses that each person is accountable for protecting the positive classroom environment. It is especially important that the teacher model polite behavior at all time.

4. **Everyone has the responsibility to be honest.**

   Honesty helps students build their own sense of honor and self-worth. It is important to praise students who truthfully accept responsibility before you address the inappropriate behavior. This will remind students that they are allowed to make mistakes and learn from them.

5. **Everyone has the responsibility to use time wisely.**

This right allows teachers to share the responsibility for time management with their students. Teachers emphasize the importance of using class time to its full advantage and that the loss of time cheats the entire class.

All education involves values. The goal of character education should be to positively influence student behavior by helping students develop core character traits. In the process of teaching, teachers demonstrate values every day. Modeling appropriate behaviors is an essential characteristic of promoting pro-social behavior. Values are demonstrated throughout the school system. Attitudes, policies, and procedures from the Board of Education to the school cafeteria workers reflect these values. As Wynne and Walberg (1985) observed the two educational goals most desired by both the public and educators - - academic competence and character development - are not mutually exclusive, but complimentary.

Ginsburg and Hanson (1986) reported that students who were self-disciplined or more religious, hard working, or valued learning, scored higher on achievement tests. Kagan (1981) and Wynne and Walberg (1985) also argue that good character ought to be the more primary focus as it is a goal in reach for more children than is high academic achievement and can result in less alienation from the school. If students learn in a comfortable classroom in a caring school, they are more likely to work hard and achieve more.

Haynes (1999) postulates the First Amendment requires that public school officials be neutral toward religion; this doesn't mean they must be neutral on moral values. When schools and communities adopt character education programs they must keep in mind that the moral life of a great many Americans is shaped by deep religious conviction. Both the approach to character education and the classroom materials used should be selected in close consultation with parents representing a broad range of perspectives. When care is taken to find consensus,

communities are able to agree on the core values they wish taught in the schools and how they wish it to be done. Public schools promote value one way or another all day long. The issue isn't whether or not to teach values. The issue is which values to teach and how to do it. Haynes goes on to say there is now a growing consensus about what constitutes high quality, comprehensive character education. According to the Character Education Partnership (1999), an effective program "helps students develop good character, which includes knowing, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values such as fairness, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and respect for self and others." Haynes says this can be done under the First Amendment. Teaching good character in public schools can be accomplished without invoking religious authority and without undermining the religious commitments of students and parents. Hundreds of school districts are doing it right now with great success.

Schools can never be free of values. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the explicit teaching of values. Character education should focus on real-life, day-to-day situations instead of placing students in unrealistic or fantasy situation. (Wynne and Walberg, 1985)

Wynne and Ryan agree with Aristotle that learning character is largely a matter of habituation. Consequently, one of the main ways to develop character is to provide planned activities which invite students to practice good habits. (Kilpatrick, 1992)

Because students come to school with diverse skills, interests, and needs, a curriculum that helps all students succeed will be one whose content and pedagogy are sophisticated enough to engage all learners. That means moving beyond a skill-and-drill, paper-and-pencil curriculum to one that is inherently interesting and meaningful for students. A character education school makes effective use of active teaching and learning methods such as cooperative learning,

problem-solving approaches, experience-based projects, and the like. One of the most authentic ways to respect children is to respect the way they learn. (Lickona, Shaps, Lewis, 2000)

Research suggests that schools do best when a character education program incorporates good moral values which are reinforced through the use of ribbons, awards, and ceremonies and teachers and other authority figures as a good character models. One character education program incorporates a "Values of the Month." Students are exposed to the word and its meaning each month as their teachers post it on a bulletin board. The morning news program on the closed-circuit television system has anchor/students remind students of the ways in which students can model that particular value. Weekly lessons use class activities to help students understand and appreciate perspectives different from their own. Teachers may use spontaneous classroom events as the basis to model how the values being learned can resolve problems in a positive way or to create a more caring atmosphere.

PeaceBuilders

PeaceBuilders is an inclusive school climate program which creates a peaceful learning environment, decreasing violence and disruptive behavior and increasing positive, respectful, thoughtful behavior. A common language and high expectations become school norms. PeaceBuilders is based on four basic principles:

- PeaceBuilders praise people
- PeaceBuilders give up put-downs
- PeaceBuilders notice hurts and right wrongs
- PeachBuilders seek wise people

This is done in the classroom through teachers infusing these principles in their Language Arts, Social Studies, and other instructional programs. They also use strategies like PraiseBoards,

Peace Circles, class meetings, student story writings, art, drama, etc. They emphasize problem solving for resolving disagreements and arguments. Everyone on the campus models these principles. Parents are involved and in some areas the whole community has become involved. PeaceBuilders schools have assemblies, celebrations, and fun activities. Evaluation studies have shown that PeaceBuilders schools have less disruptive behavior and therefore more time for learning. (Heartsprings, Inc. 1999)

Quantum Teaching

Another program that incorporates character education program is Quantum Teaching developed by Bobbi DePorter, Mark Reardon, and Sarah Singer-Nourie. The philosophy behind this program is that a learning community shares more than a common location; it also shares a common purpose and a set of principles. In the classroom, the shared purpose is for students to reach their maximum potential, learn to work cooperatively with their peers, and develop skills to be productive citizens. Quantum Teaching suggest the shared principles make a statement about the learning environment. These principles guide behavior and establish a common trust and respect for all members.

> When you teach principles, you're really teaching character. During the golden age of Greece, citizens considered character development one of the most important parts of a young person's education. Ethos or ethic refers to character - the way you should show up in your attitudes and interactions with others. According to the Greek way of thinking, everything you do - conversations, interaction with strangers, family and friends - reveals your true character. Everything speaks. Think of it as living in a fish bowl where everyone can clearly see you. It's hard to

> appear as anything other than your true character. If honesty, persistence and dependability are a part of your character, others will recognize those qualities in you and you'll be more successful in the world. (DePorter, 1999)

In Quantum Teaching a set of principles called the 8 Keys of Excellence are used. They provide a framework for a supportive and trusting environment where each person is valued and respected. The 8 Keys of Excellence are:

Integrity: Conduct yourself with authenticity, sincerity and wholeness. Your values and behavior are aligned.

Failure Leads to Success: Understand that failures simply provide you with the information you need to succeed. There are no failures, only outcomes and feedback. Everything can be useful.

Speak With Good Purpose: Speak in a positive sense, and be responsible for honest and direct communication. Avoid gossip and harmful communication.

This Is It: Focus your attention on the present moment, and make the most of it. Give each task your best effort.

Commitment: Follow through on your promises and obligations; live your vision. Do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Flexibility: Be open to change or a new approach when it helps you get the outcome you desire.

Balance: Keep your mind, body, and spirit in alignment. Spend time developing and maintaining these three areas.

When implementing this program, DePorter suggests following a specific set of guidelines. The first step to teaching the 8 Keys is modeling. A living breathing demonstration is more powerful than words. The second step is to introduce the 8 Keys through stories and metaphors. The meaning of Failure Leads to Success could be explained by sharing a life experience. Literature, fables, and even news events can also provide examples of the 8 Keys. The third step is working the 8 Keys into all parts of the curriculum. Be creative, every lesson presents and opportunity to reinforce the Keys. Making lessons personal to the students will enable them to see how they can apply the 8 Keys effectively in their own lives.

Building Effective Schools

Most programs realize that one way to motivate students is to recognize and reward their outstanding achievements. The empty feelings of a person whose good work goes unnoticed will usually have a negative impact of his or her learning. Scott Thomson, Executive Director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, said, "Americans tend to downplay recognition, except for our worship of athletes. Sport stars receive fame and fortune. Others who excel get less. Perhaps misguided sense of Jeffersonian egalitarianism restrains our enthusiasm for recognizing scholars, statesmen and artists. We seem to fear elevating the best for fear of debasing the rest." He went on to urge, "America needs to rediscover the value of recognition....High school students need recognition more today than every before." Rewarding students for their achievements enhances self-esteem and confidence. These positive feelings permeate the school, improve the general climate, and raise the level of school pride. People must feel that they are important to any group (or situation) to feel good about themselves and the group. A primary goal of schools should be to create a positive environment by recognizing

students for a variety of reasons - from academics and athletics, to good citizenship and cooperation. (Klesse and Biernat, 1989)

Building school traditions encourages students to take pride in their school. Also, a student of the month program is an excellent way of building student morale and boosting student spirit. Students who have excelled in a particular way or who have made a conspicuous contribution to the school can be honored or recognized. It is advisable to have a committee of students, parents, and staff members establish criteria and selection guidelines. A poor selection can easily nullify any benefits to the school. (Klesse and Biernat, 1989)

Effective school recognition programs not only rewards students who do well academically, they also reinforce positive behavior and motivate students to try harder. (Shadle, 1993) Shadle notes that every school has students who are uninvolved and unmotivated, and there is value in promoting the success of these students. Schools that respond to student needs for recognition and acceptance and promote positive attitudes also promote higher achievement. The challenge is for schools to develop a program which will reach and include all students, be acceptable to staff members, and still seem real, not contrived. James Shadle, as Principal at Susquehanna Township Middle School in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and his staff decided on a program for their building which evolved as an adaptation of existing "Catch Them Being Good" programs, but targeting students who were previously unrecognized as "good" in the traditional manner, but would recognize them for achieving and improving.

A character education program addresses a problem inherent in many modern school systems. In the flurry of reports and conferences and attention demanded by students with problems, the good kid who "makes no waves" sometimes gets lost. Once the need for such a

program is recognized, the implementation, if well-organized, proceeds with little problem, and the rewards far outweigh the small amount of time and effort required. (Emmick, 1984)

To the extent that character formation takes place in school, much of it accomplished through the spirit and atmosphere of a school, its sports and symbols, its activities and assemblies, its purposes and priorities, its codes of conduct and responsibility - most of all, through its teachers and the quality of their example. Ultimately, character education is the responsibility of the whole culture. That makes it a very big undertaking, but that is not to say it is impossible. Schools are not the only arena for it, but schools are a very important arena and are one place to start. (Kilpatrick, 1992)

Incorporating Character Education into the Classroom

There seem to be unlimited ways for teachers to incorporate the teaching of core character values in the classroom in addition to whichever school-wide program or programs are in place.

Role playing activities also particularly lend themselves as effective ways to promote character development. (Phelps, 1993) Role playing is a process-oriented group technique that can be used with students at all grade levels and all levels of academic achievement. (Orlich, etc. 1998) In role playing, students can adopt other persons' perspectives. Thorough preparation can help students enjoy the process and experience of role playing another person's attitude and experience without concern about interactions that might, in other circumstances, be perceived as personal attacks. Such activities allow students to increase their ability to empathize. Follow-up discussions can allow participants to share their feelings.

David H. Elkind and Freddy Sweet, Ph.D. (1997) believe that the use of classroom dialogues or discussions are extremely effective in teaching character education and ethical

choices. Through their experience as producers of public television programs based on dialogue, Elkind and Sweet have developed useful guidelines for designing questions and structuring productive discussions. They believe that any teacher should be able to learn to facilitate a successful classroom discussion by learning and practicing certain techniques. Elkind and Sweet suggest spending at least as much time in planning the discussion as in conducting the discussion because the launch is most important for successful dialogue. The best launch will be a thought-provoking question which encourage students to immediately "jump on board." A good launch is challenging and grabs the students emotionally as well as intellectually. Even though the line of questioning may be disarmingly simple, it prods the students into thinking deeply and critically about the topic. They advise that students will love to participate in conversation if they feel secure and are confident that their classmates will respect their view. During the discussion, the teacher may choose to share a personal experience with the students. Being honest with the students encourages them to express themselves honestly in return. Because the learning experience is so personal, it will also be memorable. Humor should also be used frequently as it helps everyone feel "at ease." It is important to be non-judgmental of the students themselves while at the same time holding their choices up to critical analysis by the group. It is critical, however, in issues involving right and wrong, that the teacher guide the group to the right conclusion rather than allowing the students to think that whatever they conclude is right. Following the classroom dialogue, the teacher should provide challenging follow-up projects, including writing assignments and organized group activities. These will reinforce the key learning objectives. Elkind and Sweet believe that classroom dialogues serve as learning labs for democratic principles that really pay off later in life, when, as adults, the students participate in society at large.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a good way to foster responsibility and develop good character. There are five basic principles for planning a cooperative learning experience:

1. **Positive Interdependence**

   This simply means that each member of the cooperative group depends on the others. This can be achieved by assigning a job or role for each student.

2. **Face to Face Interaction**

   Group members must be looking at each other when speaking or listening. A strategy to achieve this would be to have students sit directly across from one another, perhaps knee to knee.

3. **Individual Accountability**

   Each person is assessed for his or her part. Each group member is assigned a particular part or role and has something to do and be accountable for.

4. **Interpersonal and Social Skills**

   The students need to understand how their actions affect group members. Using good manners is effectively modeled by the teacher.

5. **Debriefing Content and Process**

   The members of the cooperative group should evaluate and reflect on both the content and the process. This can be achieved by using a checklist to assess understanding and a checklist of behaviors that asks, "how did the group work?"

During the cooperative learning experience, the teacher plays an integral part in the successful process of developing academic progress and social skills. The teacher should intervene by observing and monitoring student progress. Additionally, the teacher also models character traits that are reinforced by the students' learning activities.

The social skills that children bring to problem solving are critical to the way they develop their ability to use available resources and work cooperatively. As Maurice J. Elias and Leslie R. Branden-Muller postulate,

> *"the focus seems to be on student's' academic achievement, conveying the distinct impression that all that matters about children is their role as students and future employees. Amidst all of the emphasis on what kinds of "world class" student our nation's schools should turn out, we run the risk of losing a more encompassing focus: encouraging the development of "world class people." (1994)*

As Elias and Branden-Muller further state, one vision of the kinds of skills that can help children accomplish this is that they:

1. posses a positive sense of self-worth;
2. feel capable as they interact with others and take on new developmental tasks and challenges;
3. behave ethically and act responsibly toward others;
4. develop sound work habits, motivation, and values;
5. have a perspective on the future that provides a source of positive direction and energy;
6. appreciate the benefits of a multiracial society and respect the values of others;

7. are skilled in interpersonal encounters and communication, get along with others, and develop long-term interpersonal relationships;
8. engage in health-enhancing and health protective behaviors;
9. are motivated to become productive citizens by serving as positive, contributing member of their peer group, family, school and community; and
10. avoid engaging in behavior that may lead to negative consequences.

Teaching Character Traits Through Literature

Even though teachers may not realize it, they are communicating values every time they discuss a piece of literature. Stories help to make sense of our lives. They also create a desire to be good. Plato, who thought long and hard about the subject of moral education, believed that children should be brought up in such a way that they would fall in love with virtue. And he thought that stories and histories were the key to sparking this desire. No amount of discussion or dialogue could compensate if that spark was missing. (Kilpatrick, 1992)

Throughout history, stories have been an important way to impart values and wisdom. These words are especially important today because society has experienced a breakdown in the family and community. The values contained in literature may be an important way for children to be exposed to ethical character behavior.

When creating lesson plans to teach pro-social behavior, incorporating children's literature is an excellent technique. Students can study the characters in the story and learn from how the characters solve problems and how they interact with others. (Bellanca, 1992) Literature can arouse a child's sense of empathy and altruism. It can open a child's eyes to others' feelings, interests, and points of view that may be different from their own. Literature

can encourage discussion of alternative interpretations of behavior and it can help children discover common ground. (Katz et al., 1995; Kreider, 1995; Jones, 1994; Beguin, 1996).

The Loving Well Project

The Loving Well Project began in 1987 at Boston University as a result of *THE CHARACTER PROJECT*, a curriculum previously developed and field tested under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Teachers reported that the stories and activities enhanced students' understanding of eight vital elements of integrity and responsible citizenship (i.e. honesty, responsibility, respect, courage, persistence, love of country, fairness, and kindness). (Ellenwood and McLaren, 1994)

In the past, children's attitudes, values and behaviors were primarily developed by a strong, moral family unit. Children were expected to show respect, cooperation, responsibility, and strong work ethic. These traits were influenced and supported by society as a whole, including literature, movies, and the media.

Influences on children in today's culture are quite different. Due to changes in the family structure and the erosion of moral values in society, there is a cultural vacuum in many homes. Kilpatrick believes that a large part of the reason is that television has become the organizing principle of family life. Television, a critic Kenneth Myers has observed, can no longer be considered simply a part of the culture; rather, as Myers puts it, "it *is* our culture." "Television," he goes on to say, "is not simply the dominant medium of *popular* culture, it is the single most significant shared reality in our entire society....In television we live and move and have our being." (Kilpatrick, 1992)

Kilpatrick goes on to say that in reading to a child, you-not some distant scriptwriter-get to choose the models and morals that come into the home. Reading and listening to the right sort

of stories creates a primitive emotional attachment to behavior that is good and worthy; it implants a love and desire for virtue in the child's heart and imagination; it helps to prevent moral blindness.

Finally, reading together puts you and your children in touch with one of the great civilizing traditions of the human race. All the great cultures of the past preferred to express their most serious thought through stories. The wonder of it is that we can share in many of those same stories today. They have survived because the truths they tell are timeless. (Kilpatrick, 1992)

Jim Trelease (1989), author of The Read-Aloud Handbook, tells why he reads: I read because my father read to me. And because he'd read to me, when my time came I knew intuitively there is a torch that is supposed to be passed from one generation to the next. And through countless nights of reading I began to realize that when enough of the torchbearers-parents and teachers - stop passing the torches, a culture begins to die.

Along with parents and teachers, community members are key to the successful development of core character traits instilled in children-youth. It has been found that a school's student incentive program tends to successfully gain support from businesses in the community if the program encourages sound educational and moral principles. The support increases as test scores and attendance improve. It is beneficial when individual schools target specific business for financial and material support, and the school leaders communicate with and develop relationships with key business people in the community. The businesses' mascots or key people make an additional impact when they are part of incentive assemblies at the school. (Lipetsky, 1994)

With good foundation of character education that involves family, school, and community, students' time in the classroom will be more productive. Learning will be enhanced, not only through cooperative skills and problem-solving skills, but also because students have a strong understanding of core values and the skills by which to live.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of an increased focus on character development during the period of September, 2000 to January, 2001, the targeted students will increase skills in character development by displaying character traits as measured by pre and post surveys, checklist, interview, questionnaires, behavioral referrals, and observations.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary.

1. Introducing core character traits.
2. A focus on teaching character through literature.
3. A variety of recognition activities will be developed and implemented.
4. Direct instruction techniques will be developed to implement the character education program.

Project Action Plan

The following outline describes the implementation of interventions taken for this action research. The schedule is approximately sixteen weeks in length. The outline is organized week by week, taking into account holidays and in-service days.

Week of August 1

- Mailing of questionnaire to teachers

Week 1

- Distribute parent letter

- Administer pre survey to students
- Distribute pre questionnaire to faculty, staff, and administrators
- Introduce Character Education Program and recognition activities

Week 2-4

- Distribute pre survey to parents
- Introduce core character trait
- Begin literature units focusing on core character traits
- Implement related activities
- Role playing – journal entering – writing buddies – drama and story discussion
- Collect and analyze data from pre surveys and questionnaires

Weeks 5 –16

- Introduce additional core character traits monthly
- Continue to implement related lessons and activities
- Recognize and acknowledge children who exhibit core character traits monthly

Week 16

- Administer post survey to students
- Distribute post questionnaire (PMI) to faculty, staff, and administrators
- Distribute post survey to parents
- Collect and analyze all data

Methods of Assessment

To assess the effectiveness of our action research project, the following tools were implemented throughout the project.

List of Data Collection Tools

1. Student survey
2. Faculty and staff questionnaire
3. Administrator questionnaire
4. Parent survey
5. PMI/post survey to faculty, staff, administrators, and parents

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

This research project was designed to increase the targeted students' awareness of core character traits and incorporate the traits into their daily interactions. In order to accomplish this purpose, the teachers of the targeted classes focused on increasing direct instruction of character education words, modeling character traits, and incorporating literature into character education. The character traits targeted included: respect, responsibility, honesty, citizenship, caring, flexibility, fairness, and perseverance.

The researchers found that strong parental involvement had a positive effect on the results of the intervention. The parents participated in a pre and post survey, received a monthly newsletter, and were given information packets. The parents were also informed verbally at the parent-teacher night, and received a letter of explanation about the project.

To ascertain how much students, parents, staff, and administration knew about character traits relating to behavior, the teacher researchers conducted a pre student survey, pre parent survey, and a staff and administrator questionnaire.

A post survey was administered to students and parents again after the research intervention. A copy of the above surveys and questionnaires can be found in Appendices A, B, C, D, E, and F respectively.

The researchers utilized modeling, role-playing, positive reinforcement, recognition activities, literature, and "teachable moments" when directly teaching the eight care character traits to the students. There was a continual focus on highlighting the eight character traits throughout the curriculum. Students were recognized through student of the month activities, assemblies, certificates, and rewards.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess students' understanding of key character words and their demonstration of core character traits, post surveys were given to the targeted students at Sites A and B after the interventions took place. Parents were also surveyed to enable the researchers to analyze the parents' understanding of their child's growth regarding character education after the interventions took place.

The survey questions were related to character education traits implemented in the classroom and at home. Copies of the post surveys can be found in Appendices E and F. The findings are reported in the following graphs.

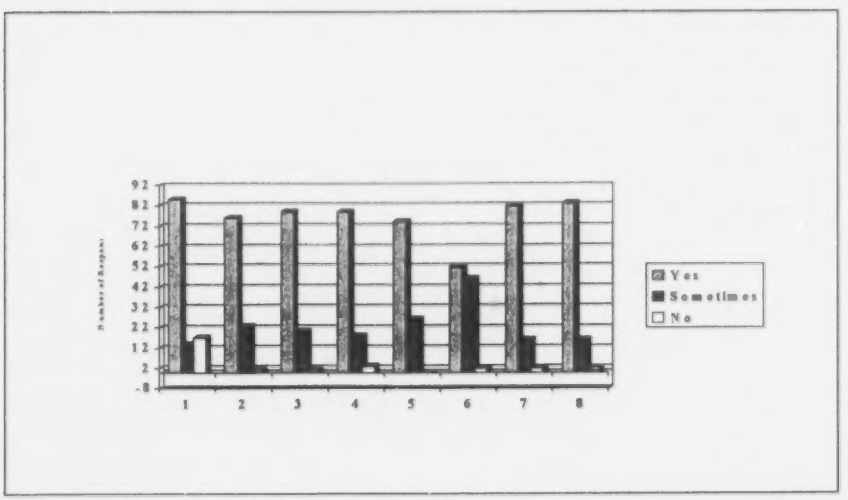

Figure 1. Results of Student Post Survey (See Appendix G).

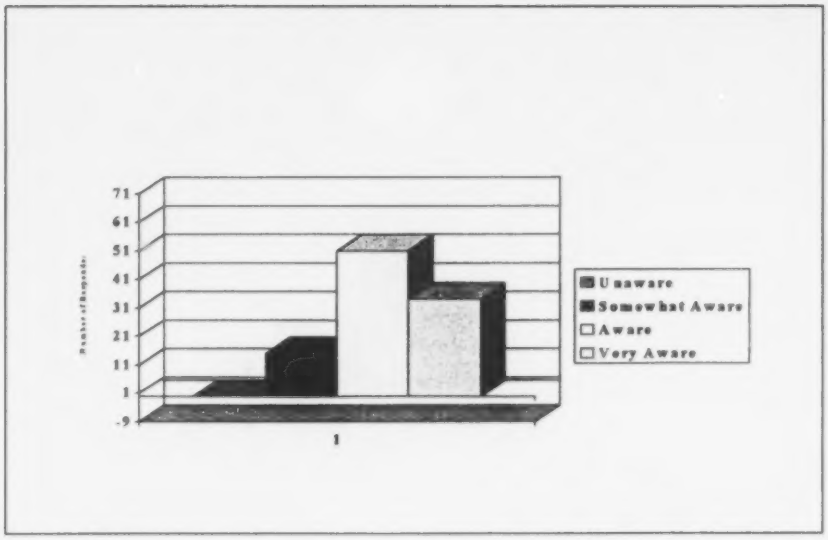

Figure 2. Results of Question 1 of the Parent Post Survey (See Appendix H).

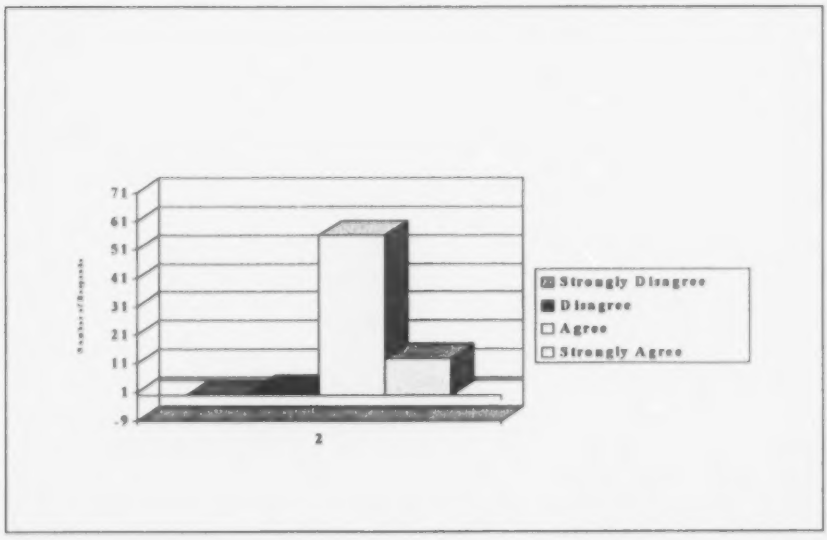

Figure 3. Results of Question 2 of the Parent Post Survey.

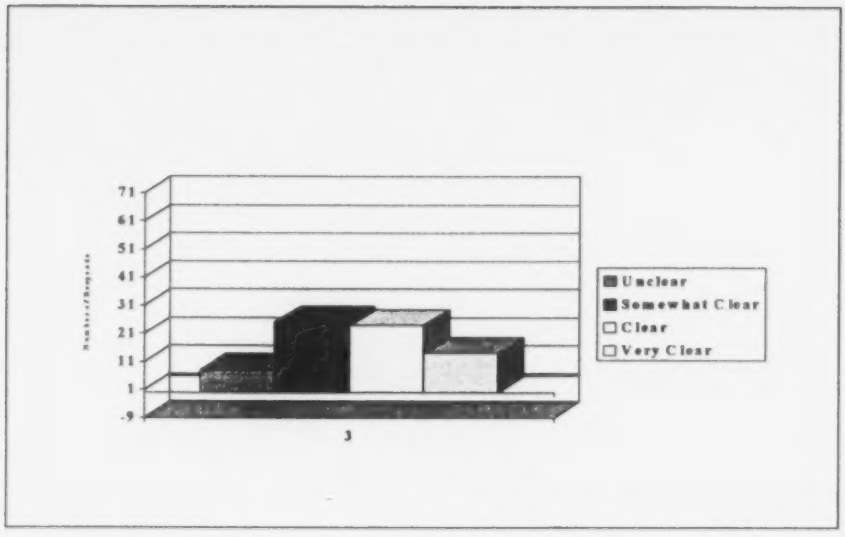

Figure 4. Results of Question 3 of the Parent Post Survey.

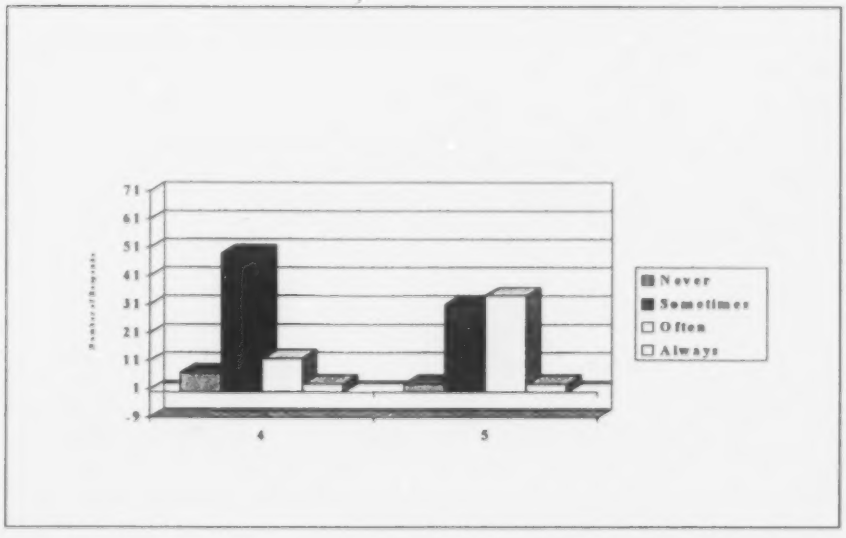

Figure 5. Results of Questions 4 and 5 of the Parent Post Survey.

The post survey seems to show that 99% of students at Sites A and B are sometimes or always aware of the citizenship-character education program at school this year, and 99% of the students surveyed feel that the targeted character education words and traits were an important part of their day at school this year. Ninety-nine percent of the targeted student's state that they understand the key character words, 89% indicate that they believe the key character words have helped their behavior improve at school. The student post survey continues to indicate that 100% of the students responded that their actions at school show their understanding of the character education words. Ninety-eight percent of the students stated that their actions at home show understanding of the key character words. A significant finding in the data from the student post survey demonstrates 99% of the targeted students believe that it is easier for them to learn when the key character words and traits are complied with in the classroom.

The researchers found through the data that implementation of the interventions had a profound influence on the targeted students' awareness of character education. The emphasis of character education throughout the curriculum was shown to be related to the students increased positive interactions with their peers. These positive results may be directly attributed to the character education program in the schools, at Sites A and B.

The results of the parent post survey appears to show that there was no noticeable increase in parental awareness of the character education program in place at Site A and Site B.

The parent pre survey indicated that 80% of the parents agreed or strongly agreed that a character education program is an important part of the school curriculum. The data from the parent post survey shows that 97% of the parents surveyed believe that character education has been an integral part of their child's education at school this year.

Of the 71 parents responding to the post survey, 89% state that their child has an understanding of the key character words. Ninety percent of parents responded that their child talks about the key character words at home and 96% of parents indicated that their child demonstrates behavior reflecting the targeted character traits. When comparing the pre and post survey, this data indicates no significant change in parent responses.

The data from the students post survey corroborates the researchers recognition of a need for a character education program in schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the data from the action research plan, the students showed improvement in both recognition of key character traits, and daily implementation of the traits. According to teacher observation, the targeted students at both sites showed a decrease in student-to-student inappropriate behaviors. As also noted by the teachers, less time was devoted to correcting inappropriate behaviors as the interventions were implemented. This allowed for more uninterrupted teaching time.

Through the use of daily direct instruction of character traits, opportunities to practice the skills being taught, recognition of appropriate implementation of the eight core character traits, and reinforcement through literature, the targeted students appeared to internalize the skills being taught. This was indicated by the students' increased ability to positively interact with their peers in the classroom, hallway, recess, and at home.

Upon reflection of this action research project, the teacher researchers noted that through developing parental awareness of character education, the success of the project was enhanced. By having strong parental involvement, the researchers felt that the parents were better equipped to reinforce the skills at home. This involvement increased the consistency between school and

home. Therefore, the teacher researchers recommend parental involvement be included in future projects.

In conclusion, the teacher researchers believe that there is a need for character education in schools and the action research project has served to reinforce this belief. With increased awareness and reinforcement of character education, the teacher researchers were excited to see an implementation of these positive traits demonstrated in students' daily interactions.

Parents at the targeted sites had many positive comments such as "I think the program is wonderful and I hope it continues. Teaching the kids the importance of the eight steps can only help them interact now as well as in the future."

Another parent reflects, "I am much more aware of the character education program this year via newsletters from the school, teacher, and my child's increasing maturity and ability to discuss the character words and what is happening in the classroom."

Consequently, the findings and teacher observations seem to indicate more time was available for academic instruction and learning, and this also resulted in enhanced self-esteem and personal growth of the targeted students.

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APPENDICES

September 5, 2000

Dear Parents,

I am currently enrolled in a master's program through Saint Xavier University. As part of the graduation requirements, I am involved with a group in an action research project. Our topic is Character Education. The purpose of this research project is to improve student's actions and behaviors at school through the recognition of eight core character traits. During this first semester, I will be implementing a variety of strategies and activities that will benefit your child's classroom experience.

Any information used will be strictly confidential, no names will be used, and participation will be in keeping with normal school procedures.

If you wish for your child **NOT** to participate in the research project, please fill out and return the bottom portion of this letter.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

---

* Please do **NOT** include my child's data in your research project.

Student's name:_____

Parent Signature:_____

Appendix B

Date:

Character Education Research Project
Student Survey

Please complete the following survey by circling yes, sometimes, or no; choose the answer, which most closely represents how you each feel about each statement. Please be honest.

1. Students should be allowed to run in the hallways at school.

   Yes Sometimes No

2. Students should be allowed to get out of their seats when the teacher is teaching a lesson.

   Yes Sometimes No

3. There should be rules in the classroom.

   Yes Sometimes No

4. Students should follow the rules.

   Yes Sometimes No

5. Students should lose privileges if they don't follow the rules.

   Yes Sometimes No

6. Parents should be called if a student breaks the rules.

   Yes Sometimes No

7. It is okay to hurt someone else.

   Yes Sometimes No

over

8. If someone hits me, I should be able to hit him or her back.

Yes Sometimes No

9. It is easier for me to learn if my classroom is quiet.

Yes Sometimes No

10. I feel safe at my school.

Yes Sometimes No

Appendix C

Character Education
Parent Survey

Please complete the following survey and return to_____by_____.
Thank you for your cooperation!

Rank the following statements.

1. Character Education should be taught exclusively at home.

   strongly disagree agree strongly agree

2. Character Education has been an integral part of my child's education at school.

   strongly disagree agree strongly agree

3. Character Education should be an integral part of my child's education at school.

   strongly disagree agree strongly agree

4. My child has a clear understanding of the eight key character words.

   unclear clear very clear

5. I am aware of the citizenship/character education at school.

   unaware aware very aware

6. When my child comes home, he/she talks about key character words.

   never sometimes often

7. When my child is at home, he/she demonstrates behavior that reflects the key character words.

   never sometimes often

Comments:

Appendix D

Date:

Staff Questionnaire
Character Education Research Project

Circle One: **Teacher** **Aide** **Custodian** **Support Staff**

Please complete the following questionnaire and return to _____ by_____.
Thank you for your cooperation!

Please describe how you perceive the general climate of our school regarding student behavior.

If there are any problems, describe the usual reasons students are sent to the office.

How effective are the building procedures for misbehavior and discipline?

Describe the level of understanding the students have regarding behavior in school.

Describe the level of understanding the students have regarding the consequences that result from not following school rules.

In your opinion, how effective is our current school discipline plan?

Does the building Character Education Program (Citizenship, Word of the Month, etc.) have any influence on students' behavior during school hours? Yes No
Please explain

Appendix E

Date:

Lunchroom Supervisor's Questionnaire
Character Education Research Project

Please complete the following questionnaire and return to _____ by_____.
Thank you for your cooperation!

Please describe how you perceive the general climate of our lunchroom and recess time regarding student behavior.

If there are any problems, describe the usual reasons students are sent from the lunchroom to the office.

How effective are the building procedures for misbehavior and discipline?

Describe the level of understanding the students have regarding behavior in the lunchroom.

Describe the level of understanding the students have regarding the consequences that result from not following the rules of the lunchroom or at lunch recess.

In your opinion, how effective is our current lunchroom discipline plan?

Does the building Character Education Program (Citizenship, Word of the Month, etc.) have any influence on students behavior in the lunchroom or at lunch recess? Yes No
Please explain.

Appendix F

Date:

Administrator's Questionnaire
Character Education Research Project

Please complete the following questionnaire and return to _____ by_____.
Thank you for your cooperation!

As an administrator, please describe how you perceive the general climate of our school regarding student behavior.

What are the usual reasons for your seeing a student for disciplinary action?

Describe the level of understanding the students have or do not have regarding the school rules. In other words, are they usually aware of what rule they did not follow?

Describe the level of understanding the students have or do not have regarding consequences that go along with those rules.

In your opinion, how effective is our current building discipline plan?

In your opinion, how effective is our current Character Education program?

What should be included in an effective Character Education program?

Thank you for taking your time to complete this questionnaire!

Appendix G
Character Education
Student Post Survey

1. I am aware of the citizenship/character education program at school this year.

   yes sometimes no

2. The key values are an important part of my day at school this year.

   yes sometimes no

3. I understand the eight key character words: Integrity, Failure leads to success, Speak with good purpose, This is it, Commitment, Ownership, Flexibility, and Balance.

   yes sometimes no

4. I believe the eight key character words have helped my behavior improve at school this year.

   yes sometimes no

5. My actions at school show that I understand the key character words.

   yes sometimes no

6. My actions at home show that I understand the key character words.

   yes sometimes no

7. I believe the eight key character words have helped my behavior toward other students.

   yes sometimes no

8. It is easier for me to learn when we follow the eight key character words in school.

   yes sometimes no

Appendix H
Character Education
Parent Post Survey

Please complete the following survey and return to_____by_____.
Thank you for your cooperation!

Rank the following statements.

1. I am aware of the citizenship/character education program at school this year.

   unaware somewhat aware aware very aware

2. Character Education has been an integral part of my child's education at school this year.

   strongly disagree disagree agree strongly agree

3. My child has a clear understanding of the eight key character words.

   unclear somewhat clear clear very clear

4. When my child comes home, he/she talks about the key character words.

   never sometimes often always

5. When my child is at home, he/she demonstrates behavior that reflects the key character words.

   never sometimes often always

Comments:

Character Education Research Project Key Words

Respect

Responsibility

Honesty

Citizenship

Caring

Flexibility

Fairness

Perseverance